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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ISLAMABAD 000809

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SUBJECT: ZADARI EXPLAINS HIS VISION TO CODEL HUTCHISON

Ref: Islamabad 745

Classified By: Anne W. Patterson, for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

Summary

¶1. (C) Summary: CODEL Hutchison met February 22 with Pakistan People's Party (PPP) Co-Chairman Asif Zadari. The CODEL expressed its condolences for Bhutto's assassination and admiration for her courage and vision. In response to Senator Hutchison's question, Zadari explained his ideas for strengthening democracy and the Parliament and how the PPP would work with PML-N. He also pledged to carry on the struggle against extremism. End summary.

¶2. (C) Pakistan People's Party (PPP) Co-Chairman Asif Zadari met with Senator Kay Bailey Hutchison (R-TX) and Representative Michael Burgess (R-TX) on February 22 at the Bhutto family residence in Islamabad. Other participants in the meeting were Enver Baig, PPP Senator, Sherry Rehman, PPP Spokesman, Amin Fahim, PPP Vice Chairman, and Ambassador. Both Senator Hutchison and Representative Burgess gave their condolences for Bhutto's assassination and remarked on her courage and vision. Zadari graciously explained that his wife "left us a mission," which he is "committed to follow." Zadari explained his vision for strengthening democracy and the Parliament. He also explained how he would carry on the struggle against extremism.

Working with PML-N

¶3. (C) Senator Hutchison asked how the PPP plans to work with the Pakistan Muslim League-N (PML-N), Nawaz Sharif's party. Zadari explained that they were already working together and had started even before the elections. He was hopeful that the two parties could form a "party of national consensus. Negotiations are at a "crucial stage" and that it is important to prove that Parliament will be strong enough to help build democracy to Pakistan. Hutchison commented that she hoped for stability; Zadari responded quickly that the PPP is not looking for violence and is seeking a smooth transition to democracy. "We are not asking for everything in one go," he said, since "institutions need time to adjust."

Continuing efforts on counter-terrorism

14. (C) In response to Hutchison's question on Parliament's willingness to continue counter-terrorism efforts, Zadari animatedly explained that Musharraf has defined this struggle wrong from "day one", saying that "we're doing this out of necessity" rather than casting it as "our war." "Thank God we have a superpower to help." Zadari remarked that Bin Laden had financed opposition to democracy as early as 1989, well before he was known to the West. He also recalled that al-Qaida had tried to assassinate his wife in 1988. Hutchison pledged that "the U.S. will be there for Pakistan on counter terrorism issues."

15. (C) Zadari expressed his conviction that the struggle against extremism would "be long and drawn-out", lasting as long as 50-100 years. Incorporating the Federally-Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) fully into Pakistan and building more schools and courts will help in this effort. There is a need to create jobs, Zadari said, to combat the salaries that al-Quaida and Taliban will pay for joining. Madrassas need to be controlled as well since most have weapons and provide training courses on their use, firmly debunking the belief that there could be moderate madrassas or a moderate Taliban.

16. (C) "My wife lost her life for this struggle," Zadari passionately stated, and "we need to rise above and change the system which created this monster." Pakistanis want to work for democracy, citing the six million people in Karachi who welcomed Benazir Bhutto when she returned from exile in October 2007. "The people are shouting, 'help us build democracy.'"

Prime Ministerial candidates?

17. (C) Hutchison asked about Zadari's current role in the PPP

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leadership and whether the party had already chosen a Prime Minister-designate. Zadari responded that he seeks to play a "constructive role" and that the party planned to choose a Prime Minister from its senior leadership, but he seeks party consensus on the choice. According to Zadari, PML-N is willing to allow PPP to be the "senior party" in the coalition, which may include the Awami National Party.

PPP future relationships with ISI and the Army

18. (C) Ambassador pointed out that, given CODEL Hutchison's next stops in Afghanistan and Iraq, Zadari's views on how the PPP government plans to integrate with the intelligence agencies and army would be of interest. Zadari responded that the PPP would consider this issue carefully once a government is formed. He advocated for well-paid, local forces, citing an anecdote that obtaining a police position in the northern areas requires a one-time payment of 40,000 rupees (USD 645) as an indication that local people are willing to serve. Sherry Rehman added previous PPP governments have had good relationships with the military and that increased civilian control would be welcomed by the military since it wants the government to take responsibility for running the country. Hutchison remarked that the combination of a strong Parliament and civilian control over the military would lead to stability and make people feel as though their votes count.

19. (C) Senator Hutchison also emphasized that an independent judiciary and strong rule of law are two important components of a favorable investment climate. Zadari responded that the former judges are "too politicized" and qualifications for judges need to be clear. He thought that Parliament should approve judicial appointments, and cited his own experience bouncing around the judicial system for eight years without being charged as a prime example of why the judicial system in Pakistan requires reform.

110. (C) Senator Hutchison remarked that while the U.S. founding fathers had put an excellent balance of power framework in place for the U.S. government, it is still difficult to strike the right balance at all times. She emphasized that the U.S. wants stability,

a flourishing democracy, fair treatment for investors, and a good partner on the war on terror for Pakistan. She appreciated that Zadari did not "ask to be put in this position" but that "greatness is sometimes derived from adversity" and that the Bhutto/Zadari family has had more than its share of adversity. If Zadari can stay the course on his program, then the PPP can be a force of stability for Pakistan.

¶11. (C) Zadari responded that his wife asked him to take on this responsibility and that "no one knew me better." He stressed that he does not want to destabilize Pakistan: terrorism is a "self-perpetuating cottage industry" which does not require much funding. We need to modernize Pakistan, citing its growing IT sector.

¶12. (U) This cable was drafted after CODEL Hutchison's departure.

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